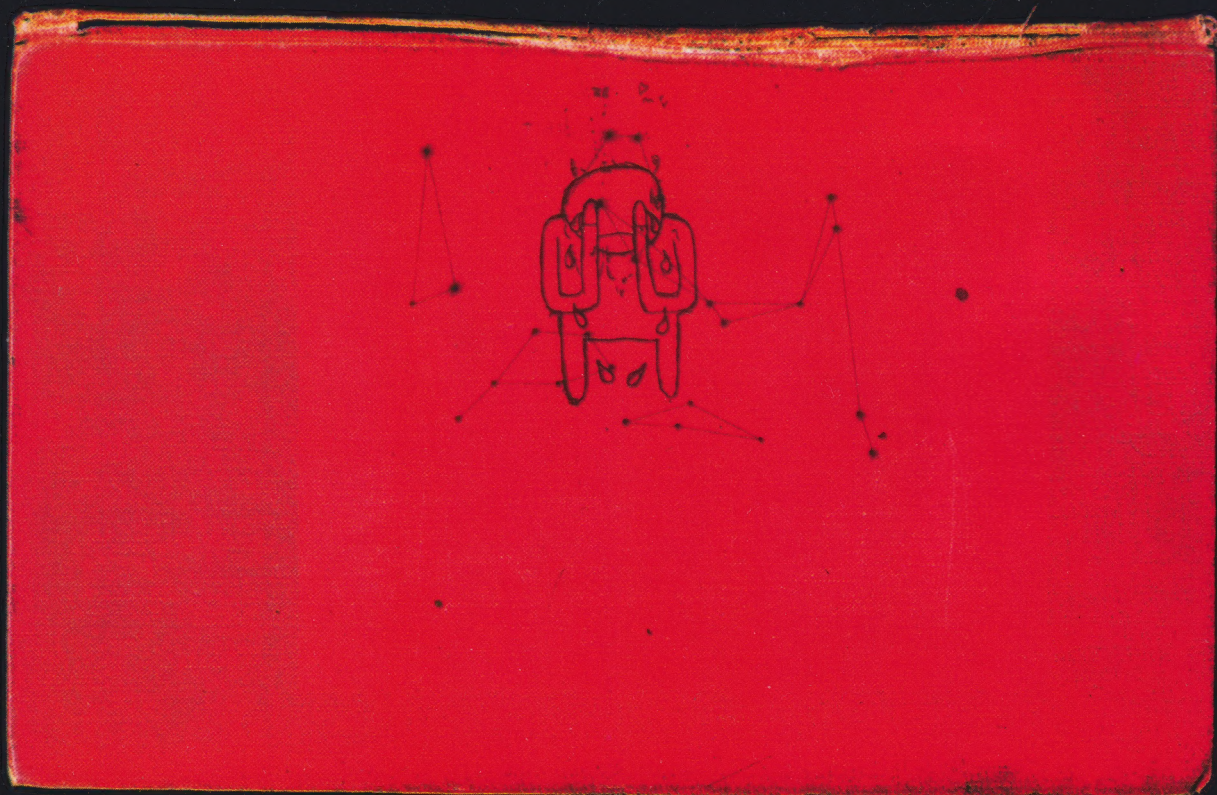


RADIOHEAD



AMNESIAC

Radio Ga Ga

Do not adjust your set. Normal service may never be resumed.

Radiohead

Kid A

PARLOPHONE COKIDA1

MAYBE WE SHOULD all get a little perspective on this. Radiohead are five blokes from Oxford; they've been at it nearly 10 years now; their last album was really rather good and now they've made another one – just as their contract stipulates. One of the band is a bit grumpy and instead of having normal, sexy pictures done for their Q interview, they did something funny with their eyes and made themselves look very strange.

To be fair to Radiohead, they've made no secret of being baffled by the palaver surrounding their new album. If some reports are to be believed, so daring, so challenging, so daunting is Kid A that the music industry will crumble around them and S Club 7 will hang their bloodied heads like penitents in the rubble of this once-smug business.

In fact, compared to the five-hour string quartets of Morton Feldman, the freakish jazz of Albert Ayler, the low-frequency oscillations of Pan Sonic or even The Residents or Faust in their terrifying heyday, Kid A is not a million miles from S Club 7. It's got keyboards and drums and singing and lyrics and guitars – if rather less of those last two than some Radiohead fans would like.

But this is disingenuous. It's perfectly fair to say that Kid A is about as experimental as a major rock record can get within the corporate straitjacket that Radiohead despise. It wasn't just pub talk to compare OK Computer to Pink Floyd's *Dark Side Of The Moon*. They bore neat similarities. Both were terrifically dark, knotty, occasionally rhapsodic rock records made by Home Counties grammar school types in foul moods. And, though OK Computer is the better record, both sent a delicious shiver through the rock audience.

In the time since OK Computer, Radiohead seem to have built up reservoirs of fresh bile, and listened to a lot of Aphex Twin records. As such, Kid A will tax even those who thought *Fitter Happier* was the catchiest thing on their last record.

IT BEGINS BRILLIANTLY, with a rolling electric piano figure that strives upwards as if on one of MC Escher's impossible staircases, with Thom Yorke's voice – chopped and shaped by Jonny Greenwood – circling the listener's head like a halo of midges. In the midst of this disorienting oddness, the fingers occasional fall on a reassuring chord, but generally the mood is sombre and ambiguous, heightened by nonsense lyrics about "waking up sucking lemons". One of the best things about

Everything In Its Right Place is that when its four minutes are over, you still have no idea what the new Radiohead album is going to sound like.

The title track follows, as beautiful as it is strange, and the first clear indication of what has been playing chez Yorke for the past three years. An extended tinnabulation where halting and childlike bell motifs pick their way through pattering drums, Kid A's plangent nursery-room vibe recalls Tele-Funken, Plone and more well-known Warp Records stalwarts such as Broadcast and Autechre.

Yorke's voice is blurred and stretched by Pro Tools software into a muted birdcall, dolorously lovely but unintelligible, which brings us to one of the sternest provisos with regard to the whole record. Members of that fraternity which believes Yorke's lyrics on OK Computer to be among the best found on any rock album will be disappointed by how lyrically negligible Kid A is: mumbo-jumbo, snatches of half-remembered dreams, scraps – and that's your lot.

The inescapable conclusion is that Yorke is seeking to disappear completely from the equation; an assessment bolstered by a track called How To Disappear Completely. The notion derives from a book of that title, a self-help guide to erasing your past identity and starting afresh, which in Yorke's version seems to entail "floating down the Liffey". Like most of Kid A's lyrics, an air of crabbed inwardness prevails, sung in that distracted moan that, along with reedy Neil Young and deadpan Bernard Sumner, has made Yorke the best non-singer in rock.

Musically, the album's best features are its keening, lapwing guitars and a thin, atonal orchestral drizzle. These submerged details are all over Kid A and are one good reason why it's best enjoyed at home with the lights off rather than alongside a mewling, puking infant on the 10.20 to Worcester Shrub Hill.

This stipulation applies particularly to Treefingers, perhaps the album's clearest acknowledgment of the debt it owes to contemporary electronica: four or so minutes of lambent sound (an elongated guitar sample) that would sit easily on Aphex Twin's *Selected Ambient Classics* or Boards Of Canada's *Music Has The Right To Children*. Treefingers will not get them bopping in the big tent this autumn but it's clearly of huge symbolic import as a map of the headspace Radiohead – or at least Thom Yorke – currently inhabit.

There are tunes here that will flap that flysheet

though. The National Anthem begins as a conventional, gnarly boogie but mutates into something Eric Dolphy or Charles Mingus would have approved of, closing with a splendidly drunken riot of horns. Furthermore, radio programmers will pounce gratefully on Optimistic, the album's most straightforward track, built around Kid A's only guitar riff. It seems to be as good as its word too, Yorke defiantly announcing, "If you try the best you can, the best you can is good enough."

The segue between Optimistic and In Limbo is Kid A's highlight; the former cooling down into loping jazz before switching into the dark circular groove of the latter. Idioteque is the much mooted dance track, though anyone expecting some cheesy ATB-style trance anthem will be disappointed by the whiny, metallic attack and Yorke's angsty "This is really happening" refrain – it's about as uplifting as Mandrax.

Morning Bell is slight but fascinating, chiefly by virtue of its oblique lyric ("Where'd you park the car?"), giving way to Motion Picture Soundtrack, an acoustic version of which was played on the OK Computer tour. Here it is re-set as a Hollywood

funeral, complete with harmoniums, heavenly choirs, harp glissandos and Yorke's weary but moving address: "White wine and sleeping pills/help me get back to your arms/I think you're

crazy, maybe/I will see you in the next life." Motion Picture Soundtracks's emotional clout comes from its perplexing compound of what seems to be genuine emotion with processed fakery. There is, inevitably, a hidden track, a minute of glowingly pretty, inconsequential electronic sound.

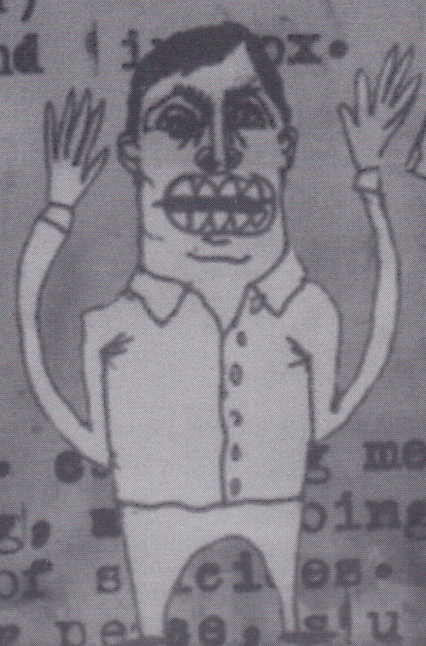
IN MANY WAYS, Kid A is less a shocking departure than Blur was after *The Great Escape*, and certainly much less so than Lou Reed's *Metal Machine Music* was after *Sally Can't Dance*. Even a cursory acquaintance with OK Computer could tell you that Radiohead were unlikely to learn a few dance steps and cover an old Bee Gees hit. Nevertheless, Kid A will still baffle and upset those who are disappointed that they don't do Creep anymore. The urge to smack Thom Yorke briskly around the chops – Eric and Ernie style – grows more irresistible with each passing day. But, God love 'em, we should be glad that in pop's increasingly bland climate a group like Radiohead can thrive. Here's to their bloody-minded, inspirational cussedness. ★★★

Stuart Maconie

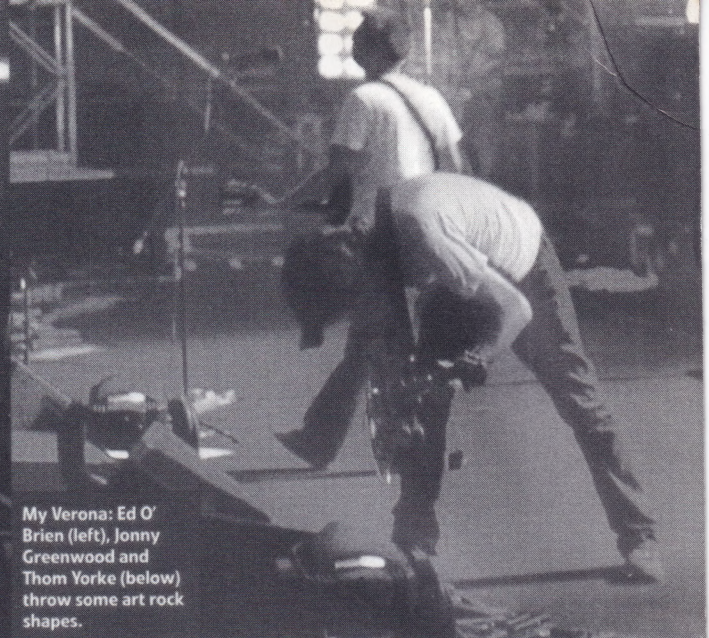
Kid A will tax even those who thought *Fitter Happier* was the catchiest thing on their last record.

why did this have to happen now?
no having time to say.
re killing all the all him ones. they feed
XX
r bodies floating down the muddy river.

(pulling wires from the ground)
pack like sardines in a crushed box.
(XXs ruggle.)



seagulls. fiveam in the forest. e. g memo
looking down evaluating, judging, n. oing
or straight to hell. in a wood of s. cicles. he
the branches. souls begging for peace, su c
wood. begging for respit. to swish them well.
and for ourselves. the clouds aren and cough



My Verona: Ed O'Brien (left), Jonny Greenwood and Thom Yorke (below) throw some art rock shapes.



AMNESIAC

In vivid contrast to the mud and beer cups littering last autumn's UK tent tour, it's hard to imagine a more congenial setting in which to see Radiohead than the Arena Di Verona. Thanks to the open-air layout and tiered seating, it manages to seat 14,000 while retaining a sense of intimacy. As jaunty pre-war jazz drifts through the PA and vendors stroll around dispensing ice creams to impeccably groomed young Italians, it feels gloriously civilised.

The sun is just about to sink behind the stage when Radiohead appear to an instant standing ovation and power into The National Anthem. For obvious reasons, the album's eight-piece brass section isn't a regular part of the show, so Jonny Greenwood fills the gap by generating unearthly warbles from his Ondes Martenot, the primitive electronic keyboard employed elsewhere on Kid A. More than ever, Greenwood looks like he's doing two jobs at once: half-guitar hero, half-techno boffin. In rock mode during My Iron Lung, he plays guitar like he's wrestling an electric eel, slashing violently at it then recoiling as if from a

"I think we honestly felt that Amnesiac was a straight ahead rock record. Then we heard the U2 album, and we thought, OK... obviously not." *Ed O'Brien*

sudden shock, but more often he's darting between keyboards, Ondes Martenot and numerous tiny devices. O'Brien, traditionally the more conventional guitarist, also does his share of crouching down to fiddle with samplers and effects boxes.

"We're a different band, even from last year," O'Brien explains later. "We're not scared anymore. We used to be fraught with such tension before we went on but now we're fairly relaxed. If you're looking for the full-on mental fuck-out that we used to do then you'll be disappointed. We can't do that every night. But I think we play the songs a lot better because the Kid A and Amnesiac songs need you to be relaxed. You can't go on with that speedy type thing. The band's got a natural kind of swing."

Even in their most obtuse moments, Radiohead have never been the kind of group to shun the hits. Theirs is an artfully constructed set, sandwiching newer songs between seasoned crowd-pleasers. Thus Dollars And Cents, which is hard work

whichever way you slice it, falls between No Surprises and Climbing Up The Walls. The fragile, troubling Morning Bell segues into a stunning Lucky, during which the sun sets behind the band and the combination of dry ice and lurid red and yellow lights creates the illusion that the stage is on fire. The lights play tricks during No Surprises as well, casting a colossal shadow of Greenwood on the xylophone against the side of the arena, like a spectre hammering on the audience's heads. The first encore commences with a performance of Fake Plastic Trees so vast and moving that lighters and candles flicker like fireflies across the arena and one girl actually bursts into tears halfway through.

As evidence of just how far Radiohead have come, however, it's impossible to beat the main set's closing trio of Paranoid Android, Idioteque and Everything In Its Right Place. However odd Paranoid Android sounded back in 1997, it's the Ramones compared to what follows. Idioteque's cruel synthesized pulse strikes up and Yorke starts



Faux logo: Set list band's own, knock off T-shirts most definitely not



NATIONAL ANTHEM
MORNING BELL
LUCKY
MY IRON LUNG
IN LIMBO
PACKT LIKE SARDINES
BONES
EXIT MUSIC
NO SURPRISES
DOLLARS + CENTS
CLIMBING UP THE WALL
KARMA POLICE
I MIGHT BE WRONG
PYRAMID SONG
PARANOID ANDROID
IDIOTEQUE
E'THING IN ITS RIGHT PLACE

FAKE PLASTIC TREES
AIRBAG
STREET SPIRIT
HOW TO DISAPPEAR
TALK SHOW HOST
THE BENDS

SEP 2001 OCT 2001 NOV 2001



spasming in inimitable angst raver style. Then Selway joins in with something resembling fractured drum'n'bass. As Jonny Greenwood and Ed O'Brien layer on the effects, it even threatens to transmute into the pattering Eastern groove of Missy Elliott's Get Ur Freak On. ("That's a really good idea," enthuses Elliott fan O'Brien when this is pointed out. "We could do that!") By the end, Yorke is twitching, arms aloft, lost inside it all.

Everything In Its Right Place is stranger still, evolving into pure improvisation as Greenwood triggers samples of Yorke's voice and the rest of the band drive the track further towards a jazz/techno/Krautrock meltdown. Rhodes chords loop and shimmer, rows of fluorescent strip lights flash from the backdrop and Radiohead depart to a roar of approval. They do not play Creep.

There are rooms backstage but Radiohead prefer to unwind in a section of the stone corridor that winds around the arena. While birds nesting in the roof flap their wings and the rest of the band chat to friends and family in front of a menacing backdrop of medieval pikes and swords, Phil Selway ruminates on the joys of exorcising the ghost of OK Computer.

"The fear was that it could have completely nosedived after that and nothing could have

matched it," he reflects. "Next time around we won't have that same level of expectation and that definitely tripped us up at the beginning of recording Kid A and Amnesiac. The kind of feedback we've had off these two albums I think more genuinely reflects us than the press did for OK Computer because that was just silly, really. There are bits on OK Computer that people could have criticised, but nobody did. This is a rather more complete picture."

With the release of two more singles from Amnesiac – Knives Out and I Might Be Wrong – the final fruits of the album sessions will find homes as B-sides, including the much-discussed Cut Tooth. "We've managed to clear the decks now," Selway smiles with relief. "There can finally be some kind of closure to that period." They've also been writing new songs during rehearsals, but beyond the end of the Amnesiac tour in October their diary is blank for the first time in a long, long while. They're clearly having fun again.

The same week as the Verona concert, they appear on Top Of The Pops for the first time in five years, performing the solemn, elegaic Pyramid Song alongside the likes of UK garage goon DJ Pied Piper.

"It was great," chuckles Selway. "I think we stuck out like a sore thumb. It was quite reminiscent of us doing a Smash Hits party with My Iron Lung a long time ago. We were sandwiched

between Robson & Jerome and Take That at Docklands Arena. There were loads of screaming prepubescent girls in there and the moment we came on the place was silent. You could see the fear in their eyes as we were playing."

AT ONE O'CLOCK in the morning, Radiohead head back to their hotel, where the drinking will continue into the wee hours. By chance, Q finds itself leaving the venue in the same people carrier as Thom Yorke and getting a glimpse of life in a glasshouse. The coach pulls off in a blaze of camera flashes, inching its way through hordes of fans who bang on the windows and vainly wave autograph books. One group of fans, undaunted by being on the wrong side of the vehicle, take snaps of producer Nigel Godrich and a bemused Q instead.

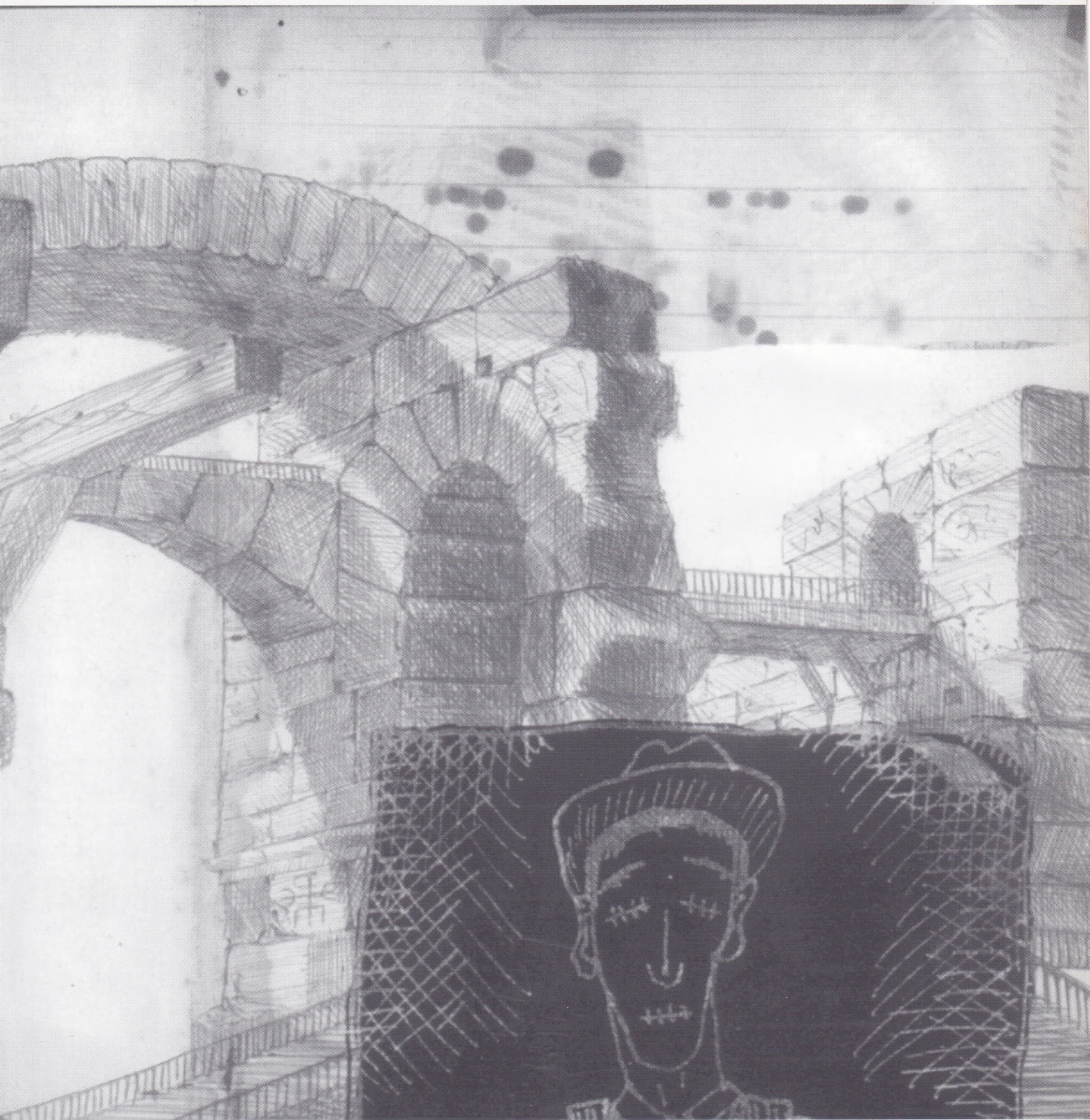
"Just smile," advises Godrich. "I have to do it all the time."

Yorke appears simultaneously flattered, embarrassed, terrified and amused. Only half-joking, he shouts to the driver: "Floor it! Fucking put your foot down! I could be doing this all night!"

Is this what usually happens after a gig, Thom?

"Yeah, happens all the time," he deadpans. "Happens when I go to the shops."

And the coach finally speeds off, the screams of "Tommy! Tommy!" fading away behind it into the warm night air.





No Kidding

Well, what did you expect? Choruses?

Radiohead

Amnesiac

PARLOPHONE CD FHEIT 45101

LET US, WITH a wobbly dissolve, revisit September 2000. It is raining like a bastard. Concert-goers are returning from the Newport show that heralds the release of Radiohead's *Kid A*, raving about two songs, *Knives Out* and *You & Whose Army?*, easily the most robust of the eerie new pieces premiered. They wend homewards, agreeing that the new tunes sound weird but good, but that they prefer the ones with the drums and guitars to the ones where Jonny Greenwood twiddles his FX knobs and Thom Yorke plays the spinet.

That *Knives Out* and *You & Whose Army?* did not make it onto the delicate, Tiny Tim Cratchitt of an album that emerged seemed evidence enough of Radiohead's commercial death wish. When it was hinted that these songs would form the centrepiece of a follow-up LP, possibly as early as April 2001, disappointment gave way to anticipation. Subsequently, heroically, Tiny Tim dragged his be-calipered leg to the top of the US albums chart; in Britain he had been forgotten already. And why? Because *Amnesiac* was coming.

NO ALBUM OF the modern pop era has overshadowed its predecessor as ominously as *Amnesiac*. *Kid A*'s obstetrician had barely slapped its arse than its five fathers had stubbed out their cigars and set about plugging its sibling. *Amnesiac*, in the words of Ed O'Brien, would comprise songs that "didn't fit" on *Kid A*. Nobody imagined this meant songs like *The Lambeth Walk* or *Black Dog* or *I'm Horny* (Horny, Horny Horny), but the presumption was that this would be more of a rock band record with some big old tunes.

Well, forget that. *Amnesiac* is a companion work to *Kid A* in the way that David Bowie's "Heroes" complements *Low* or (steady, now) King Crimson's *In The Wake Of Poseidon* echoes *In The Court Of The Crimson King*. As per *Kid A*, it opens with the track most overtly influenced by radical techno music, and, in a move that dooms the two records to be forever spoken of in the same breath, both pivot on a version of *Morning Bell* (in this instance entitled *The Morning Bell Amnesiac*), more of which later. *Amnesiac* is similarly shy, textural and embroidered by electronica, but where it differs vitally from *Kid A* is in being 1) better balanced, 2) more emotionally intelligible and 3) even more grimly beautiful.

The aforementioned opener is *Packt Like Sardines In A Crushd Tin*

Box. With its electro-gamelan intro and grotesquely garbled voices, it ups the ante on *Kid A*'s *Everything In Its Right Place* and could even be its answer song. It is a grumbly old thing, but it does not prepare the listener for the bleak tundra that follows. *Pyramid Song*, chosen as the single presumably to bark a hollow laugh in the face of daytime radio, is almost certainly about the consolations of suicide. A piano evokes water lapping on a shoreline, Yorke imagines "black-eyed angels" swimming alongside him. Way, way in the background a sawing string section create a shimmery hubbub which sounds exactly how you would imagine black-eyed angels to sound. Especially when they're swimming.

"We all went to heaven in a little row boat," Yorke warbles, remembering the children's skipping song, Tom Waits's *Clap Hands* or (and we would pay money for this to be true) the *Belle Stars'* *The Clapping Song*. A superb Eastern string melody is tossed away as a chord turnaround and drummer Phil Selway cranks the beauty and anguish up and down with each patter and tish. Yorke played this live, alone, at the piano at a 1999 Amsterdam show, only then it was called *Nothing To Fear*. There weren't a lot of people dancing.

Either Yorke's lyrics are better this time, or the comparative voluptuousness of the vocal performances make it easier to tune in, or we've finally grasped what he's been getting at since abandoning *OK Computer*'s more straightforward man-vs-society musings.

Accidentally, perhaps, *Amnesiac* is an incremental, song-by-song construction of a dream realm full of implied horror, reinforced by nursery rhyme, kiddie phrases and musical irony. Indicative of the latter is *Pull Pulk Revolving Doors*, where Yorke's treated voice struggles against hard, ragged-edged beats to deliver what at first seems a banal list. "There are sliding doors and there are secret doors," he monotonizes. "There are doors that lock and doors that don't, there are doors that let you in and out but never open, but there are trapdoors..." At which the bottom falls out of the music and we are left plummeting through space.

There isn't a band around who can mock, frame, comment upon or elucidate the activities of their singer better than Radiohead. So it's a shame we don't hear more of O'Brien, Selway and the Greenwoods. Arguably, *Amnesiac*'s central troika of *You And Whose Army?*, *I Might Be Wrong* (the

first US single) and *Knives Out* could be their partial retort to this post-*Kid A* gripe. Guitars are certainly more prominent in this selection, not only in Thom Yorke's *étude*, *Hunting Bears*, but also in the grainy blues riff that drives *I Might Be Wrong* and Jonny Greenwood's delay pedal-picking that embroiders *Knives Out*, the album's best ensemble piece and a close relative of *Paranoid Android*.

Like *You And Whose Army?*, *Knives Out*'s lyric is a collage of playground taunts. As before, we cannot know how serious the narrator is or what real-life nastiness the flippancy masks: "Cook him up, squash his head, put him in the pot." Ewww.

Two thirds in and so far, so good but, really, what are we to make of *The Morning Bell Amnesiac*? Did Thom Yorke run out of songs? Probably not, as there's still no room for *Big Boots*, one of the band's most anticipated works-in-progress. Here it's darker, more funereal and organic than its *Kid A* cousin, and what sounded like "cut the kids' hair" on *Kid A* is now unarguably "cut the kids in half", Yorke making the song much more transparently about divorce. Perhaps this is Radiohead telling us that they are now a jazz band, offering "interpretations".

And the rest? *Dollars & Cents* is an over-long attempt to employ a string section, hinting at the mad crescendos of Miles Davis's *Bitches Brew*, but actually the first to bite the dust in the *Compile One Album Out Of Kid A And Amnesiac* pub game that

won't be sweeping the nation this month. Like *Spinning Plates* is a buzzing technified vignette promoted to a status beyond its means. *Hunting Bears* you know about. *Life In A Glasshouse* is *Amnesiac*'s final revelation: a Humphrey Lyttelton-enhanced New

Orleans funeral march with Yorke delineating the demise of a passionate friendship in this new, half-symbolic way of his. It is brilliant music ending a largely fine record and – even better – it has a ring of truth about it.

SO WHERE DOES *Amnesiac* leave the Radiohead project? As an exercise in de-branding, it's going swimmingly. They've deconstructed their rock bandness and their appeal is becoming more selective. Maybe this will make them happy. Meanwhile, Yorke sounds as bereft as Bono at the end of *Pop* or Ian Curtis at the end of *Closer*. In *Amnesiac*, he has built a vision of hell: numb, petty, desolate and with no obvious escape route. Party on, Thom. ★★★★★

Danny Eccleston

Nobody imagined songs like I'm Horny (Horny, Horny, Horny), but the presumption was that this would be a record with tunes.



Frustration, tension, confusion," recalls Thom Yorke, casting his mind back to the initial spurts of work for Kid A and its successor, Amnesiac. "We had no distance. It was so intense." He grabs his hair and shakes his head in mock despair. "Fucking hell," he marvels. "I was totally convinced we were heading in the wrong direction."

Yorke may have since come to the conclusion that he was doing something right – but even now, it's difficult to establish how the world feels about the left-turn that Radiohead announced to the world in late 2000. Certainly, as for The Bends and OK Computer, there is no universally-admiring consensus: for every convert, there is a puzzled soul wondering what on earth happened to the group who wrote Fake Plastic Trees. Only at the music's most extreme can one possibly allude to any unanimity – it's a fair bet, for example, that even the most hardened Radiohead zealot is occasionally tempted to nudge the next track button within the opening bars of Treefingers, the ambient wash-scape that marks Kid A's aimless lowpoint.

When Nick Hornby reviewed Kid A for The New Yorker, he sounded very un-chuffed indeed. "You have to work at albums like Kid A," he wrote.

"You have to sit at home night after night and give yourself over to paranoid millennial atmosphere as you try to decipher elliptical snatches of lyrics and puzzle out how the titles might refer to the songs. In other words, you have to be 16... Anyone old enough to vote may find that he has competing demands for his time – a relationship, say, or a job, or buying food, or listening to another CD he picked up on the same day."

That review still festers with Radiohead's more hardcore constituency. Type "Nick Hornby, Radiohead" into any half-decent search engine, and you'll be confronted by irate screeds. They burst with both righteous anger and the idea that, in the post-millennial era, it is the fate of anything remotely cerebral to be unthinkingly cast to the margins. Surveying the "debate" – roughly, the consumers of the world running back to Chris Rea, while 27 devotees guard the entrance to their cave

– you start to wonder how Radiohead have managed to sell any records at all.

Yet they have. Kid A is an American Number 1 album which got its authors on the Letterman show. In July, Radiohead will play a self-organised show to 30,000 people in Oxford. Pyramid Song entered the UK charts at Number 5. Roll over Erik Satie and tell Penderecki the news: there is room for this stuff in the mainstream.

So yes, Kid A (and Amnesiac, which we'll come on to) requires a bit of "work", ie you have to play it six or seven times before it decisively reveals its charms. Some of it – the title track, the aforementioned Treefingers – should arguably have remained in the box marked "discarded experiments". But it soars to pretty dizzy heights on account of two trump cards: the simple quality of music as good as Everything In Its Right Place, Optimistic and The Morning Bell, and the fact that, at a time when most

**"When I was recording I've Seen It
All, with Björk, I got all emotional
at one point, and she said, Don't
do that, it's selfish!"**



of popular music's ambitions are inch-high, it oozes the desperate desire to go somewhere utterly new.

When the two come together, and you get something as good as the brass-laden coda of *The National Anthem*, you can only swoon. This is the sound of people feeling duty-bound to push the envelope and pulling off their designs with breathtaking panache. That's what *The Beatles* were famous for.

AND NOW WE have *Amnesiac*, which Nick Hornby probably won't like either. Trailed by whispers of a return to quickly-digestible rock music, which may have been mischievously put about by the group themselves, it is some distance from such talk. In terms of its prevailing characteristics, in fact, *Amnesiac* is – surprise! – of a piece with *Kid A*.

"When we were on tour with *Kid A*," said Yorke recently, "we had the tapes with us and we were trying to work out a running order. I was listening to *Amnesiac* a lot then. And it was kind of nice, because it was the secret record. It felt like it was our secret weapon against all the weirdness going on – the fact that we had another one that nobody else had."

Now it has crash-landed in the public domain, however, it allows yet more light to shine on the 18-months of fall-out, panic and eventual triumph – spread across Paris, Copenhagen and Oxfordshire – that marked Radiohead's progress after *OK Computer*. Given that there's now a definitive version of, say, *You And Whose Army*, you can read

through Ed O'Brien's infamous studio diaries (still archived at www.radiohead.com) and start to make sense of exactly what this most self-analytical of groups has just emerged from.

"A pretty frustrating day," he wrote on 27 July, 1999. "It starts well, with a different version of *How To Disappear and Everything In Its Right Place*... However, we have definitively lost our way with *You And Whose Army* – it was sounding great last week, so what happened today? Time to go home."

By 7 December, the song was being re-routed somewhere very strange indeed. "Looked at *You And Whose Army* again from two weeks ago," O'Brien wrote. "Tried this different vocal idea that Thom and Jonny had been going on about: three-

part but with a very low bass harmony, kind of *Ink Spots*-esque. This is always dangerous territory, ie there would be nothing more sad than this slick sophisticated '40s vocal group sound."

For the benefit of younger readers, the *Ink Spots* were a hugely popular black vocal quartet formed in the early 1930s, whose songs all began with the whimsical guitar figure later used on *Toffee Crisp* adverts. They're a pretty unlikely touchstone for a modern rock band. Still, for all O'Brien's misgivings, it is the *Spots*-cribbing version of *You And Whose Army* that made the final cut.

It's a good thing, too. The song, as has been well-documented, is a wry statement of defiance *vis-à-vis* the Blair regime – although righteous anger is what he often deserves, the most intelligent response is usually a quiet smile at the ludicrousness of it all. The *Ink Spots* reference makes that plain – once you know that, you're in on the joke. "It's not meant to be taken seriously – it's a funny song," says Yorke. And he should know.

Now, with *Kid A* and *Amnesiac* completed, Thom Yorke is beginning to get his head round the vexatious path that led Radiohead here. Bouts of all-consuming anxiety are a recurrent feature: there was a huge crisis just after the start of the sessions for *The Bends*, and spasms of doubt and uncertainty throughout *OK Computer*. For that album, according to Ed O'Brien, they recorded 16 versions of *No Surprises* before going back to the original. This >>



EPILOGUE

'Recently someone asked me, "What does your paradise look like?" All I could think of was a big empty room and a couple of Radiohead songs that are half finished.' **Jonny**

SO, even at the peak of his powers and with massive adulation behind him, Thom Yorke is still unsettled. Although he has continually denied he is an outsider, and certainly has refused the rock martyr status that others are so keen to thrust upon him, it is understandable why such a burden is laid on his frail shoulders. His superb, peculiar and intensely emotional lyrics, his enigmatic and at times awkward public persona, and his physical appearance have rightly been cited as proof that he is not your average pop star. Neither are Radiohead your average band. Their early days as On A Friday, the stumbling first singles, the two-edged success of 'Creep', and the moderate first album, marked them out as nothing if not different. Their natural modesty, the immediate assumption that what they do is useless, is refreshing in the face of hordes of lad bands who brashly proclaim that they are the greatest band in the world. Their complete and utter lack of rock 'n' roll excess is similarly untypical, as is the fact they are so huge despite having released only three albums in their twelve years as a band. The critical acclaim that greeted *The Bends* and then the more universal applause for *OK Computer*, an album that will come to hold historical significance when the tale of rock music is told, have proved that Radiohead are a rare phenomenon among modern bands – one that thinks, sounds, plays, records and *exists* like no other.



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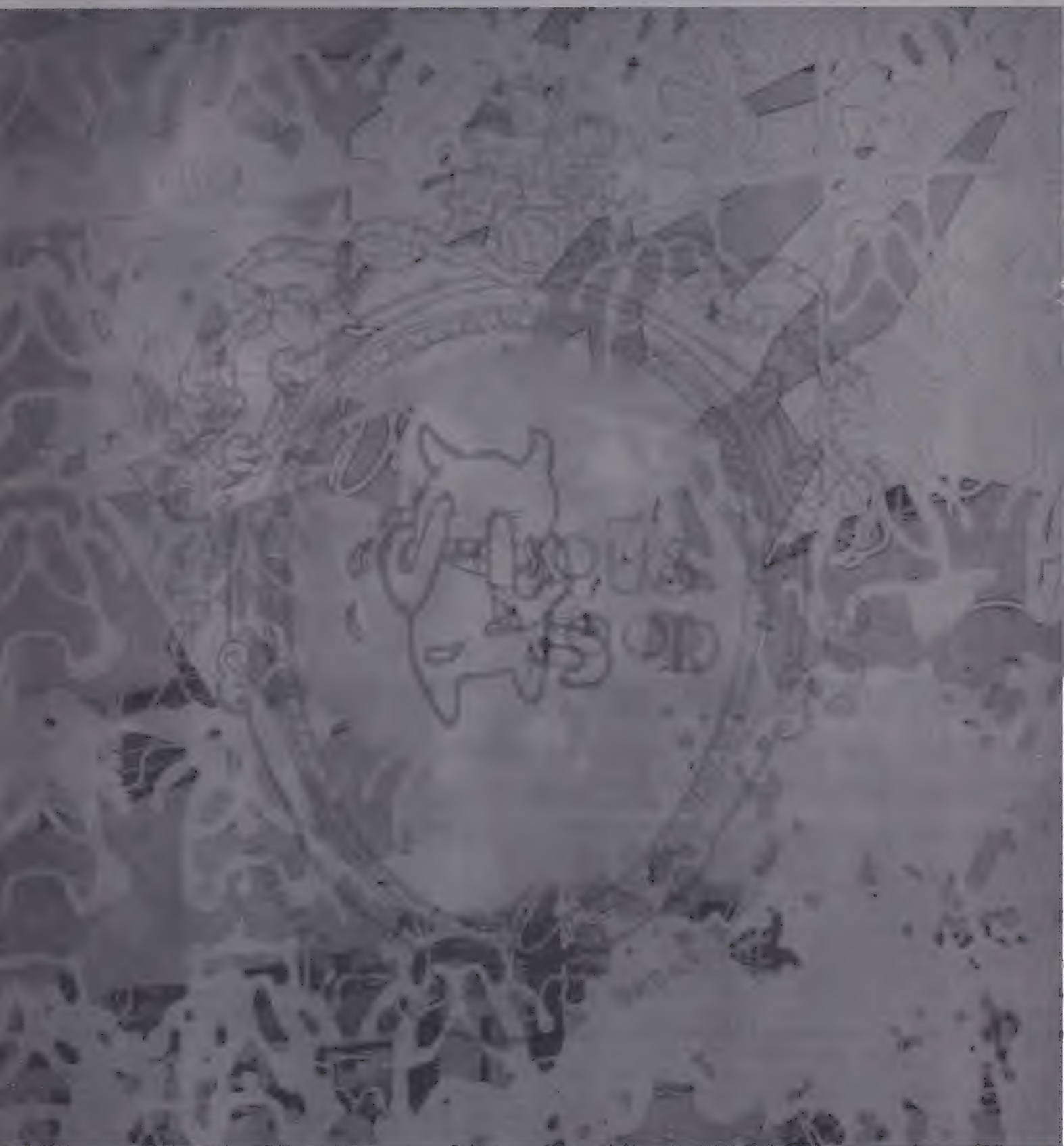
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Radiohead Recruit New Member!

Brit jazz veteran Humphrey Lyttleton helps out on new album's free-form epic.

Eight months ago, Radiohead were in the midst of the lengthy recording sessions that preceded *Kid A*. However, one track in particular – a predictably free-form, experimental number called *Living In A Glass House* – was proving tricky to complete. Unable to find a solution, guitarist Jonny Greenwood sat down and wrote a letter to the man he believed could help them out: Humphrey Lyttleton, septuagenarian jazz trumpeter and presenter of Radio 4's long-running panel show *I'm Sorry I Haven't A Clue*.

"It's probably an awful cheek and we're sure you're very busy," read Greenwood's suitably deferential missive, "but we're a bit stuck."

Such politeness paid off and with Lyttleton's help *Living In A Glass House* was eventually completed last summer. It's now set for release on *Kid A*'s successor, *Amnesiac*, due for release on 4 June.

"It's wild," says Lyttleton, sat in the dimly-lit back room of the Bull's Head, the Barnes pub where he and his band have enjoyed a 20-year residency. "It starts with me doing a sort of ad-libbed, bluesy, minor key meandering, then it gradually gets so that we're sort of playing real wild, primitive, New Orleans blues stuff."

He lifts his trumpet and gives Q a short blast by way of explanation. "Skronnnk!"

Inevitably, Lyttleton, who during the 1950s was at the forefront of the trad jazz movement in Britain, had never heard of Radiohead before their collaboration. After borrowing *OK Computer* from his daughter and a brief meeting with Greenwood, the trumpet master and his usual quintet joined the rest of the band in a recording studio in Bayswater.

"People had said that they were all crazy but in fact we had a good time," he says. But it took a while for both parties to get familiarized.

"Nobody knew what anybody was going

to do!" says Lyttleton. "They didn't want it to sound like a slick studio production but a slightly exploratory thing of people playing as if they didn't have it all planned out in advance. However, I detected some sort of eye-rolling at the start of the session, as if to say we were

miles apart. They went through quite a few nervous breakdowns during the course of it all, just through trying to explain to us all what they wanted.

Thom Yorke's behaviour was especially curious.

"Thom was doing his vocals and he'd have vanished from view altogether," says Lyttleton. "He'd be sitting cross-legged in some sort of meditative posture at the bottom of the vocal booth."

The session lasted seven hours, leaving Lyttleton exhausted.

"My chops were getting in a very ragged state," he says. "So when we finally got a take that sounded good to me, they said, Good, we'll go and have some food, then we'll come back and do some more. I said, Not me. It was a very heavy day."

Yorke recently described *Amnesiac* as "the sound of what it feels like to be standing in the fire". The album was recorded at the same time as *Kid A* but, according to the singer, "it comes from a different place," and is reputed to be more accessible than its predecessor. But if *Living In A Glass House* is anything to go by, Yorke's lyrics may still be of the lemon-sucking variety.

"The words are very surreal, rather like Procul Harem's *Whiter Shade Of Pale*," says Lyttleton, who received a letter of thanks from the band. "I wouldn't compare them, because I think Thom's are slightly better, but they're coming from the same sort of area."

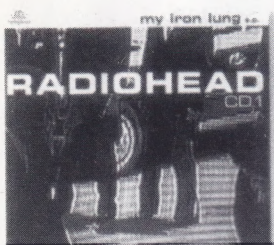
Pat Long

"People said Radiohead were all crazy but in fact we had a good time."



Radiohead: "Hmm. Should we take the old boy on tour?"

B-Sides



THE TRICKSTER

B-side of *My Iron Lung*
(SEPTEMBER 1994)

The six tracks on the two formatted CD singles add up to a virtual mini-LP of material to fill the awkward two-year gap between Pablo Honey and *The Bends*. They didn't want to make this too good, but the best tracks are fascinating insights into this painful transitional period. Similar to the Manic Street Preachers' later Kevin Carter, this tensile track reveals a band discovering forms of rock dynamism more subtle than quiet-bit-loud-bit. Not immediately understandable lines like "A can of brick dust worms" and "Please tread carefully/ Escaped from the zoo" still manage to suggest a world gone very wrong.



PUNCHDRUNK LOVESICK SINGALONG

B-side of *My Iron Lung*
(SEPTEMBER 1994)

With languid, aqueous atmospherics suggesting Tim Buckley on a trip to SeaWorld, this track was an early indication that Radiohead were never going to be happy sounding like one band. Greenwood's whale-like guitar points to escape from the loathed indie-buzz of their early years, while Yorke has perfected the high-pitched keening thing that is later used to more central effect. Faced with such a beautiful epic, most bands would make it a centrepiece of their set. Radiohead have only played it live once or twice.



YOU NEVER WASH UP AFTER YOURSELF

B-side of *My Iron Lung*
(SEPTEMBER 1994)

Probably the most mournful track ever about an aversion to handling Fairy Liquid, this spare voice/guitar miniature (clocking in at 1:40) is a real gem. Written by Yorke in a very dark place after returning from tour at the end of 1993, the feel is of an ancient folk song – if ancient folk songs concerned staying in bed surrounded by dirty dishes, dying plants and spiders crawling over you. The subject was apparently close to reality: the singer's lethargic neglect led to the fish in his pond dying. Hence the line: "Everything's starting to die."



MAQUILADORA

B-side of *High & Dry/ Planet Telex*
(FEBRUARY 1995)

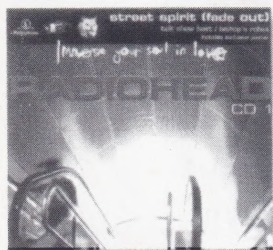
Squealing, churning power-rock with a triumphal Sturm und Drang vibe. Radiohead go Queen. Mind you, the apocalyptic lyrics about exploding hills and burning freeways might have sounded odd from Freddie Mercury. Despite this track's scale, it didn't make *The Bends* – perhaps because the thrusting pomp was embarrassing. A maquiladora is a US-owned industrial plant over the Mexican border that, via a special customs agreement, enables US businesses to import raw materials and take advantage of the cheap labour. Not that this is mentioned in the song.



INDIA RUBBER

B-side of *Fake Plastic Trees*
(MAY 1995)

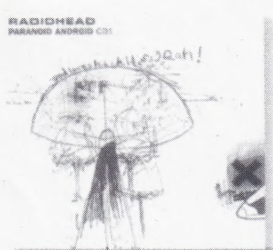
Long before the electro-glitch experimentation of *Idioteque*, Radiohead do indie-dance. Only back then they made it sound like fun. If the glammy riff recalls Suede's debut single *The Drowners*, this stealthily insinuating glide was the first real suggestion that they had been getting into DJ Shadow-style trip-hop. According to Colin Greenwood, the closing looped laughter is his brother Jonny "laughing at one of his own jokes, as usual, that he's nicked from Stephen Fry or some Radio 4 light entertainment programme from the last 30 years".



BISHOP'S ROBES

B-side of *Street Spirit (Fade Out)*
(JANUARY 1996)

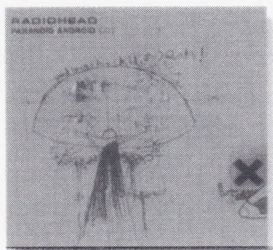
Almost Thom Yorke's take on The Smiths' *The Headmaster Ritual*, this song lays into the "bastard headmaster" of Abingdon Boys' School, the figure who hung ominously over Yorke's educational life. Featuring slide guitar and ambient scree, this intense mood-piece was recorded in 1995 but wouldn't sound too out of place on either of Radiohead's 21st century albums. Ed O'Brien has commented: "I think the best bit of recording we ever did was in 1995 when we did Lucky, Talk Show Host and Bishop's Robes and we had three days to do it in."



PEARLY*

B-side of *Paranoid Android*
(MAY 1997)

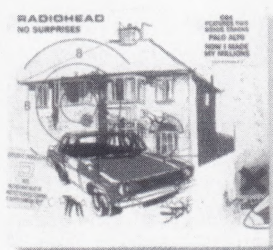
Radiohead rarely sound what you'd call cool, but they do here. The OK Computer sessions saw them becoming utterly immersed in Ennio Morricone and this excellent slice of spaghetti western rock was one obvious result. The mean, magnificent guitars and climactically doomy drums suggest a posse galloping into town. The lyrics, however, paint an anaemically modern Western world of pearly white teeth and hard-rock cafes. Perhaps its slightly bludgeoning nature kept it off OK Computer. Musically, though, it's top-notch, and found its way onto a few setlists for the following tour.



A REMINDER

B-side of *Paranoid Android*
(MAY 1997)

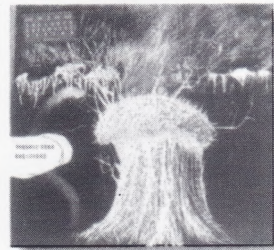
Another superb precursor of their more recent work, this glacial elegy actually isn't a million miles from latest single *Pyramid Song*. Opening with echoey booking hall chatter recorded in the Czech Republic, its slow glide resembles Krautrock stuck in treacle. The title refers to the lyrics which are about making sure you don't lose your vitality. Yorke once even went so far as to explain them: "I had this idea of someone writing a song, sending it to someone and saying, 'If I ever lose it, just pick up the phone and play me this song back to remind me.'"



PALO ALTO

B-side of *No Surprises*
(JANUARY 1998)

Kind of the aural equivalent of that scrawled symbol of briefcase-wielding businessmen the band used for the OK Computer artwork, this song refers to the Silicon Valley, California base of numerous large US corporations. When Radiohead visited the town, they were not overly impressed with its sanitised commercialism. But it did inspire this storming rocker, one of the last appearances of the group's capability for full-on rifferama. Power chords! Loads of electronic arabesques! Technology-induced alienation! And all at the same time, too.



TRANS-ATLANTIC DRAWL

B-side of *Pyramid Song*
(MAY 2001)

The title might indicate Radiohead-by-numbers, but no; over a noirish bassline, Yorke rasps Steve Malkmus-style about how magazines screw you over. Then the guitars come in with the kind of industrial-metal squall that Graham Coxon probably dreams about. If you thought Jonny and Ed weren't allowed to rock out anymore, this attempt to out-Royal Trux Royal Trux will come as a bit of a shock. Oh yes, and after a couple of minutes, it becomes a warmly subdued electronic hymn to eternal emptiness. They do keep you guessing.



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Place Pages in a Small Box
Place in a Drawer and Forget about.

DRAWN

